

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – 13th June 2019

PRESS RELEASE

THE PUBLIC VOTE FOR SHARED PARENTING

As Father's Day approaches and the Government get underway with a rapid review of the Family Courtsⁱ a brand new survey of more than 2000 people by YouGov has shown overwhelming support for equal shared parenting. Of those who gave an opinion, 82% agreed that there should be a presumption in law that children should spend roughly equal time with each of their parents following a divorce or separation, excluding cases where there is a proven risk to the child. There were no significant differences in gender, age or marital status in determining how people responded and that, to the best of our knowledge, the public have never been asked directly about their views on a presumption in law of equal parenting time post-divorce or separation

Commissioned by FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru the poll supports the call for a change in the law to make it much clearer what 'normal' should look like when parents split.

Suella Braverman MP – who introduced a Ten Minute Rule Bill on Family Justice in 2017 said

“Shared parenting needs to be introduced into our law. Every child has a right to a meaningful relationship with both parents but at present the law does not make this clear. In the worst cases, ‘parental involvement’ from divorce settlements can amount to little more a birthday card, effectively airbrushing a non-resident parent from a child’s life.

“We know that children who have a good relationship with both parents are less likely to experience depression, teenage pregnancy and delinquency and those growing up without a father in their life typically struggle to reach their full potential academically, socially or professionally. A key problem is that court’s assessments of how much contact a child should have with a non-resident parent is often based on out-dated views. It is time the Government exercises its potential to address the problem of children growing up in broken families and rectifies some of the serious injustices inherent in England’s current divorce law.”

Tens of thousands of fathers and grandparents are effectively removed from the lives of the children they care about on the whim of a controlling parent. While more than 48,000 people a year (70% of them fathers) make an application to the Family Court many more lack the thousands of pounds that solicitors typically quote to represent them in proceedings. Others face false allegations designed simply to prevent a child from a loving relationship with the other parent and their side of the family. Grandparents also suffer terribly when their son (or daughter) isn't the main carer - but the real losers in all this are the children.

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Evidence from academics all around the world consistently shows the huge benefits to children from having both parents involved positively in their lives – whether as a close family unit or as two single parents. In 60 studies from around the worldⁱⁱ recently reviewed by Professor Linda Nielsen of Wake Forest University, North Carolina, children in joint physical custody had better outcomes than children in sole physical custody on all the measures of behavioural, emotional, physical and academic wellbeing. They also had better relationship with parents and grandparents. This is not just a lone study but a meta study culminating in a consensus of social scientists and child experts in many different countries over the last 40 years that, in most cases, a shared parenting arrangement is conducive to the best interests of the child which is rightly the ‘gold standard’ of children’s acts throughout the world.

Shared care is often dismissed as not working for parents in poorer situations or where conflict levels are high, but Nielsen’s meta-analysis found better outcomes for children independent of household income or conflict.

Anne O’Regan – grandmother and Vice Chair of Trustees at FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru said:

‘It’s a living bereavement for the parents and grandparents we see at our support meetings, broken by the selfish actions of controlling parents who simply grab the children, pull up the drawbridge and say – ‘Take me to Court’ knowing that this will be impossible for many to afford. Who steps in then to protect the child from this kind of domestic abuse?

Then it’s false allegations – easy to make with no evidence at all. I’ve seen men on the edge of suicide accused of rape, child sex abuse and domestic violence with not a shred of evidence. Family ‘Justice’!? – it’s a mockery of the word.

The other big loser in contact disputes is the taxpayer. The cost of what’s called Private Law - is difficult to estimate because the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) doesn’t record that separately. Despite the often repeated claim that Legal Aid is no longer available the MoJ spent more than £100m in 2017/18 - 85% going to mothers, who are overwhelmingly the ones denying the child’s right to a relationship with their father. Cafcass – in England and Wales have a combined budget in excess of £150 million – much of which is spent on providing advice to Courts when dealing with parental disputes.

Equal shared parenting won’t work in every case. The Poll clearly stated that it would not apply when there are proven risks to parent or child. In the worst cases – involving child death where a serious case review is held, it is more likely to be the mother – or the mother and her new partner – who are culpable in the tragic deaths of those children.ⁱⁱⁱ The chilling words of child killer Samira Lupidi^{iv} should never be forgotten. Admitted to a refuge in

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Bradford after making allegations against her ex-partner, the then 24 year old stabbed her two children to death with a carving knife saying

“If I can’t have them, he can’t have them either”

That’s why - Both Parents Matter.

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/spotlight-on-child-protection-in-family-courts>

ⁱⁱ Linda Nielsen. (2018) [Preface to the Special Issue: Shared Physical Custody: Recent Research, Advances, and Applications](#). *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage* 59:4, pages 237-246.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://empathygap.uk/?p=1503>

^{iv} <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/young-mother-killed-daughters-at-refuge-7mkrlqzl7>

ABOUT THE CHARITY

FNF Both Parents Matter Cymru is a registered charity providing information advice and assistance to parents and grandparents with child contact difficulties through it’s ‘Both Parents Matter’ services. The charity is also a specialist domestic violence support service for male victims of abuse using the brand AEGIS.

The charity runs the largest network of specialist family law clinics under the Law Society’s charity Law Works and was short listed for a prize at the 2018 Law Works Awards in the category – Best Pro-Bono Partnership.

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